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'XI JINPING CONCERNED ABOUT WEAKENING POLITICAL IDEOLOGY IN PLA'

by JAYADEVA RANADE

There are adequate signs that Chinese President Xi Jinping and senior echelons of the Chinese leadership are concerned at the levels of corruption in the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and China's defence industry. They are more worried at the wavering in the political and ideological commitment of PLA officers and personnel to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Central Committee (CC). Accordingly, a major new education campaign focussed on instilling political loyalty to Xi Jinping has been launched. On February 5, a "Notice" in the PLA Daily, whose importance was highlighted as it was issued under the signature of its Editor, again emphasised the need for the PLA to be "absolutely loyal" to the CCP CC and have "firm political loyalty" and be ideologically committed to it. It particularly targeted the senior PLA echelons with decision-making authority and said a "key minority" needed to "strengthen learning and the ideological transformation".

2. These concerns have become serious in the aftermath of the 'removal' of Defence Minister Li Shangfu and two successive Heads of the Central Military Commission (CMC) Political Work Department Zhang Yang and Miao Hua, who were in charge of ensuring the loyalty of personnel. Miao Hua especially was a close associate of Xi Jinping who gave him a second consecutive term as CMC member. The concerns were evident at the Central Military Commission (CMC) Political Work Conference in June 2024, where Xi Jinping emphasized the political loyalty of the armed forces as crucial. He emphasized the need to uphold the Party's absolute leadership over the military and to 'build a high-quality cadre team that is loyal, clean, responsible, and capable of fulfilling the mission' of strengthening the military. Xi Jinping said it is necessary to continuously enhance political loyalty in the military to ensure that the people's armed forces always uphold their core values, maintain purity, and strictly adhere to discipline. He analysed that the lack of ideals and beliefs is the root cause of these problems. A series of steps were taken after the Political Work Conference to tackle corruption, and instil the correct political and ideological commitment in the personnel.

3. The extent of corruption was revealed when, despite consecutive year-long anti-corruption campaigns throughout the PLA, a series of fresh purges were effected at senior levels of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and China's defence industry. In addition to the dozens of senior PLA Rocket Force officers dismissed since late 2023, at least 13 PLA Generals were removed from the National People's Congress (NPC). Reports suggest that since late 2024, a quiet purge has been underway in the China State Shipbuilding Corporation (CSSC), one of China's top ten defence groups that owns some of the most well-known Chinese shipbuilders such as the Dalian Shipbuilding Industry Company, Jiangnan Shipyard, Hudong-Zhonghua Shipbuilding, Guangzhou Huangpu Shipbuilding and Guangzhou Wenchong Shipyard.

Another seven senior executives in China's sensitive defence industrial complex have been identified as having been removed. Among them are: Tan Ruisong (former Chairman of AVIC), Zhou Yiming (Chairman), Hao Zhaoping (Gen Manager), Yang Wei (Vice Gen Mgr AVIC), Hu Weiming and Su Bo (the former Chairman and former Gen Mgr respectively of CSIC), Jiao Jige (former Chairman Hunan Aerospace) and Xue Jianguo (former Party Secretary and Chairman of Harbin First Machinery Group Co., Ltd. of China North Industries Group Corporation). There are indications now that this purge is likely to expand its remit and sharpen its focus to also ensure that senior officials are politically and ideologically aligned with the CCP Central Committee and Central Military Commission with "Xi Jinping at the core".

4. Following the enlarged meeting of the Central Military Commission Discipline Inspection Commission held in Beijing on January 10, the PLA has launched a campaign throughout the PLA to strengthen the political and ideological commitment of its personnel. Addressing the enlarged meeting, CMC Vice Chairman General He Weidong emphasised "the need to adhere to the guidance of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, deepen the comprehensive and strict governance of the Party and the army, and deeply understand the decisive significance of the "two establishments", achieve the "two safeguards". He Weidong said "this year, we must deepen political training, rectify work styles and fight corruption, strengthen political supervision" and rectify thoughts, organizations, and "continuously purify the political ecology". The message was subsequently reiterated in a Commentator's article in the PLA Daily. It urged that "The entire army should unite more closely around the Party Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping as the core, adhere to the guidance of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, thoroughly implement Xi Jinping's Thought on Strengthening the Army, deeply understand the decisive significance of "two establishments", enhance the "four consciousnesses", strengthen the "four self-confidences", and achieve the "two safeguards", implement the responsibility system of the Chairman of the Central Military Commission...".

5. While visiting PLA units during the Spring Festival later in January, CMC Vice Chairman General Zhang Youxia emphasized that "we must truly study, understand, believe in and apply Xi Jinping's thoughts on strengthening the military, thoroughly implement the spirit of the CMC's political work conference, further forge a political character of obeying the party's command and being loyal to the party". CMC Vice Chairman General He Weidong repeated the message while visiting PLA units in Beijing. PLA units across China have begun implementing the instructions of the Political Work Conference. For example, the Shaanxi Provincial Military District reported earlier in February that it had "thoroughly studied and implemented the spirit" of the Central Military Commission's political work conference. The paramilitary Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps also reported it had held meetings to emphasise the "two establishments" and the "two safeguards".

6. Action has also been taken to prevent the spread of incorrect ideas. The PLA recently issued the "Internet Military Information Dissemination Management Measures" prohibiting information that attacks the nation's defence policies and military operations abroad. The regulations reveal the kind of "incorrect" ideas that the CCP's senior echelons are concerned about. The regulations categorize military-related information into three types: one type is encouraged and supported for dissemination, while the other two types are prohibited to be disseminated online. The latter cite the type of information that are prohibited. These include

slandering the party's absolute leadership over the military, the system of responsibility of the Chairman of the Central Military Commission, the "depoliticization and de-partyization of the military" and "nationalization of the military", among others. The "depoliticization and de-partyization of the military" and "nationalization of the military" have been persistent issues in the PLA for the past few years. Problems appear to have been accentuated with the PLA's effort to recruit educated college or high school graduates. There have been sporadic articles by PLA instructors complaining that young recruits are not amenable to discipline or question the PLA's "absolute loyalty" to the CCP.

7. The 'Notice' published by the CMC's Political Work Department in the People's Liberation Army Daily (February 5) was captioned the "Notice on Deepening the Education and Practice Activities Focusing on 'Forging Firm Political Loyalty and Winning the Battle of Hard Work'". It heralded launch of the "annual major education of the entire army" and asserted that it would "strengthen political guidance". Emphasising Xi Jinping and the CCP's leading roles, it stressed that "we must unremittably use Xi Jinping's Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era to unite hearts and build souls" and "must always regard the Party's innovative theoretical arming as the primary task of building souls and educating people, deeply and persistently study Xi Jinping's Thought on Strengthening the Military". It made specific mention of the need to strengthen learning and ideological transformation of the "key minority". The reference to the "key minority" implies there are officers at senior levels in the PLA who are not in step with Xi Jinping's thoughts or who the CCP leadership feels they may not be easy to control. Referring to the PLA's centenary goal, it added "We must closely follow the development of the cause of strengthening the army and the actual situation of preparing for war, and closely follow the needs of cultivating officers and soldiers' values and growing up, and carry out special education focusing on strengthening the belief in strengthening the army" and "All levels must strengthen organizational leadership, scientifically plan and implement, and continuously enhance the pertinence and effectiveness of education".

8. The appearance of the 'Notice' and launch of a major political campaign clearly indicate that there are problems in the higher echelons of PLA. There are indications of similar problems in the Party with Politburo Standing Committee member and Director of the CCP CC General Office Cai Qi convening all-China conferences on the 'need to continuously strengthen cohesion and forge the Party's soul' and 'enhance the Party's political building'. The CCP leadership will probably take more tougher measures to contain dissatisfaction especially as the next Party Congress draws near.

(The author is Member of the National Security Advisory Board and President of the Centre for China Analysis and Strategy.)